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The feeble-minded blind.

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gain not only refinement in life, but increased economic prosperity.

C. A. Prosser
The William Hood Dunwoody
Industrial Institute,
Minneapolis

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## THE FEEBLEMINDED BLIND

Are the materials now in use by the blind for reading, writing and number work equally applicable in the case of the feebleminded blind?

It is only in very recent years that the feebleminded blind as a class has been brought to our attention. Up to this time we laid all strange behavior, mannerisms and lack of learning ability to blindness itself. All blind children were herded into institutions and given a certain line of instruction which was thought suitable for the blind. Those who failed to absorb the instruction were looked upon as perfectly normal sightless children, those who succeeded in grasping their school work in an average manner were thought of as geniuses or near geniuses and the truly superior blind child was heralded throughout the land as a wonder, almost amounting to freakishness. Though medicine had long before, in the case of the sighted, realized that certain diseases affected the central nervous system in such a way as to bring about a state of mental deficiency, it seemed to fail in the case of the sightless to realize that these same diseases brought about the same results with one more added factor—blindness.

In the sighted world the mental defective has become so familiar a person that to tell his story seems almost vain repetition, but even in his case we have only just touched the hem of the garment of understanding. In the case of the feebleminded blind there are many still who pooh pooh his existence. They will not understand that the young blind man or woman who is content to beg on the streets does so for the very same reason that many of our sighted beggars do it: lack of initiative, lack of will power, and lack of intelligence. This is very much more prevalent among the mentally deficient blind than it is with the sighted defective because up to a very, very short time ago, the feebleminded blind were neglected and ignored. If ever the workers in ungraded classes become discouraged at their seeming slowness of progress, let them compare the sighted defective with his blind brother and they will feel amply repaid for their efforts, however arduous they may be.

The educators of the blind are still very much at sea as to who is mentally defective and who is not, and this must, of course, continue until we develop instruments of precision such as are now in use for the examination of the sighted feebleminded. Efforts along this line are constantly being made and it is to be hoped in the near future that a method will be evolved which will be satisfactory to all the workers in the field. I, myself, am making some experiments with the Binet Stanford revision scale, which are proving very interesting and which I hope soon to present for inspection and criticism to my instructors and advisers in Columbia University.

Having now established the fact that there are feebleminded blind, let us consider what materials are used for their instruction and how ready they are to use these materials.

It would seem better to answer the last part of this question first. How ready are the feebleminded blind to use these materials? In order to answer this, let us look for a moment into a typical home of such a child. The probability is very great indeed, that the home is very inferior. Often there are other blind and deficient members of the family. Many of these homes harbor contagious eye diseases and, nine times out of ten, the deficient blind child is a helpless unloved little thing, banished to the darkest and most unlovely spot in the house, usually fed only liquid food by means of a cup or spoon, almost never allowed to walk about by itself, lest it should fall and hurt itself and thus call down upon the mother the condemnation of the un-understanding neighbors. If the exception does happen, and the family is a decent and respected one in the community, the little child is loved to death, waited on hand and foot, never allowed to think or do for himself, and his plight is almost as bad as the unloved child. I have known cases of children who have reached the age of six years who have never taken a step alone. When we consider that the eye of the blind is his hands, we can readily understand how necessary it is for him to become more than efficient in the use of these, and we can also readily understand that the lack of training fostered in a home such as just described, would seriously impede the progress of the poor little unfortunates committed to our schools and institutions. Very often these children appear to be much more deficient mentally than they really are, but I maintain that they must be mentally deficient in order to remain passive for so many years. I have known many mentally normal blind children with homes and conditions quite as unfavorable who openly rebel at confinement and who escape to play with the other children whenever the slightest opportunity is given them. Of these latter cases I am prepared to cite at least a hundred.

Now what are we to do with our deficient blind child who has reached the age where the law compels him to be educated? Are we to glibly dispose of him as an institutional case, thus relieving a neglectful mother of her rightful responsibility and depriving the child of home environment and sighted companions with whom he can grow up and be friends all of his life? Or shall we, as we now are trying to do, send these poor little unequipped people into special public school classes for the blind, where the normal and superior children are eager, anxious and able to take their places with the sighted world in becoming socially efficient? What does it mean to have even a high-grade moron who is blind in a school room? It means that he must have just four times the attention of a normal blind child in order to give him his educational rights. Some one will ask here (in fact, most of the teachers of the blind in public schools have asked me), can these feebleminded children really learn after all? Is it possible to teach them to read, write and cipher? For some time I could only answer "yes" in theory. But now I have partially completed my work with three groups of feebleminded children, all supposedly unteachable, and am able to confidently affirm that the feebleminded blind are just as able to receive their educational rights and make good use of them as are the feebleminded sighted.

Like the feebleminded sighted, there are those whose intelligence does not permit instruction in the three "R's" but these children have rights all the same. And there is still a vast field of education open to them. Since, however, my problem is to discuss the materials employed in reading, writing and arithmetic, I shall leave the lower grades for the present and confine myself to relating the results and methods of my partially complete experiment of three groups of mentally defective children with I.Q.'s of 66, 63, and 59, respectively. Mental age 9-8-10 years. Each one of these groups contained six members and the groups were taken from blind children chosen at random. Thus

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some members were institutional while others were not. Each group received ten minutes' instruction daily in each of the three R's.

Since reading offers the greatest difficulties on account of the various types in vogue at present, let us begin with the discussion of this subject. There are in use to-day five different kinds of raised print and up to now there has been great controversy raging as to which should become universal. Since 1918, all are agreed upon using the English Braille with very slight changes. But even now the public school uses the American Braille exclusively, the New York Institution clings to the N. Y. Point (a type altogether different from the Braille) whereas the monthly magazines and most of the later and better books are published in the new and revised Braille. None of these types is similar enough to the others to enable one to read it without a separate learning process. The combination of dots in the different types do not mean at all the same thing, nor is one type in any way related to another. So, first of all comes the question, what type shall we use with young children? If we use the new and undoubtedly the coming type (Revised Braille) we then bar our children from either the institution or the public school instruction for all the public school text-books are printed in American Braille and those of the institution in N. Y. Point. If, on the other hand, we use American Braille, we preclude the possibility of our children reading the best literature of England and America, since this is very largely published in English or Revised Braille. N. Y. Point is so little used outside of the institution of New York that it is not a very large factor in the training of young children, though it does play an important rôle in the life of the adult blind, as it had great popularity in the past.

Since the question as to which type to use is just a matter of choosing the lesser of two evils, I decided to divide my group in half, teaching 3 of each group, American Braille and 3 the Revised. As I had about equal intelligence and equal mental age in each group, I hoped to make a start toward proving which was the easier type.

It has been difficult, nay impossible to devise a way whereby a beginner in finger reading could perceive an entire word. In order to determine a combination of dots which make up a letter, the beginner's finger must stop on each letter. Therefore, we can not as with sighted children teach whole words at first. As the child becomes accustomed to recognizing letters he then is introduced to signs and contractions which go to make up a shorthand system enabling the skilled blind child to read as rapidly as his sighted brother, but were we to introduce these contractions and signs at first, our children could never learn to spell, nor could there be the slightest transfer from their reading ability over to typewriting, their best and only means of graphic communication with the sighted world. A blind child must be made to realize that each word is made up of a combination of letters, which produce sounds and which when looked at by the sighted or felt by the blind will call to mind a specific word. Since the range of the finger is not as great as the range of the eye, it seems best to first teach the alphabet to our blind child before attempting words. Right here there arises a problem with our feebleminded child. It has been proved conclusively that you can not teach a deficient child an abstract uninteresting fact like an alphabet. What do the A B C's mean to a child who is just waking up to the fact that he has hands and feet. How can we relate our alphabet to this awakening knowledge? This is much more of a problem than it appears to be. All the children in all my groups played their first games with me. They did not know what it was to make a ring and the experience was as great for the little child who was the handkerchief dropper in that famous old game, as any aviator's first flight.

We glibly talk in training classes about going from the known to the unknown, but how little we realize the infinite patience it takes to find any "known" to start from in the case of the feebleminded blind. Think, for example, of the terrible gulf between those poor little waving, flapping hands and the motor coordination necessary to feel two or three small dots which combine to form a Braille letter. You can readily see that it takes many weeks of training of just the most primitive kind before the child is even ready to begin to think about reading.

Now, let us fancy that all that period of preparation has been successfully passed over and that our child has learned to model clay, fold papers, weave mats, build, and trace forms with a tracing wheel. (This latter method, though original with me, I find most helpful both in the development of form sense and in the accuracy of dot feeling. It greatly aids in the later process of reading and writing, and in the mentally normal can be developed into picture tracing.) We are now ready to link up our alphabet with what has already been learned. It must be meaningful and it must be interesting. All through the period of preparation there have been stories which have to do with things the children know about or are learning about, and they are very eager listeners, since it is in most cases their first experience with stories. Sometimes they are asked to be the story tellers of the class and to invent the games to be played that day. Always we have luncheon parties and during the preparation period we use dolls' dishes, but real food and water. They are made to look forward to the day when we shall have a real dinner party with big dishes and a place-card, so that they can find their own places, and by this time they are so used to imagining games that they are quite anxious to have fictitious names so we begin by calling them Mrs. A. and Mrs. B., and so on, until they have learned the sound of alphabet names. Then comes the day when they are old enough for real plates (of course these children serve the food themselves and pass it to one another). They are all seated at the table and I hand them their names, that is, A, B, C to feel. They are told to feel it carefully, so that to-morrow when we have a grown-up guest she will wonder how the children find their way and know just where to sit. Nothing is ever said about taking the letters home with them to study, but no child ever left his card and only the very fewest mistakes were made the next day. If mistakes were made, they kept the old name until the next day. If not, they had a new one. Soon the alphabet was learned, never to be forgotten and then we began making the small words. As soon as words were learned I wrote letters to each child, suggesting in writing very alluring things to do, such as: "Have food out under the trees." "Go for a walk," and things they liked to do. But no word was ever spoken about these little secrets and no two children ever got the same message exactly, so that if one had trouble in reading his note he could ask help of one or more members of the group. This was immensely successful and we soon learned to read quite complicated messages. I found that the children would say to

me, "spell Go" and "spell Walk" until finally spelling was a request lesson. When more and more words were learned, I made all kinds of signs to fit their games and seeing me make them they were soon inspired to want to write, so that they could help me. Therefore, one day was introduced the slate for writing. This is a special writing frame, which consists of two metal blades of equal size hinged together at one end, usually not more than one foot in length. One of these has cut into it two or more rows of cells of the required point space, while the other consists of a grooved bed, or a base with writing " pits " drilled into it, one blade fitting over the other. Between these blades the paper is inserted, the one with the cell openings being placed above, and into it are impressed, with the aid of a small pointed stylus, dots in the desired number and position. The impressions are made from right to left, so that the protuberances will appear on the reverse side in the accustomed order, or from left to right. Here we meet the problem of motor coordination to a much larger degree even than in reading, and before we try the slate I use a pin pad which is squared off in cells which resemble those of the slate, only much bigger, and we learn to form our letters with large gold-headed picture tacks. In teaching the normal blind to write Braille, the combinations are dictated by numbers, thus the letter n would be one, three, four, five, but I find that in teaching the mentally deficient, numbers are meaningless abstract things to them and they understand me far better when I tell them that n is upper right, lower right, upper left and middle left. Why is this so? Because their direction for walking and for finding things and for placing furniture in the rooms is dictated in terms of right and left, middle, upper and lower. This seems like a very small detail to bother teachers with, but I found it made all the difference in the world in the children's learning to write. After all, it is the little things which go to make up a great whole.

When we have at last learned to form our letters, we try the slate, but the spaces into which we must go are very small, and we must be very precise, especially with the middle dots. Here it becomes a case of patiently guiding the hand for weeks and weeks until a habit is formed of moving a certain measured distance. It finally comes all at once and the child is able to write. Of course, the intelligence and the motor disabilities play a part here, just as they do in penmanship but even though the child does not become accurate he can to some extent write, and if there is an incentive, he will practise until his work is at least legible. The problem of arithmetic is as yet too incomplete for me to say much about it. My little groups are very fond of mental arithmetic, which we first learned through games and manual work, and they have only just asked to learn how to make figures on the type slate (an oblong frame containing cells into which fit small metal type which are turned in various ways to form numbers).

I have no doubt, however, that arithmetic will be as successful as arithmetic ever is with children of these I.Q.'s and of these mental ages. I found in my groups that the best readers and writers were the three with the highest intelligence who used the revised Braille. In the second group the three who read best were also those who used the revised Braille and in the third group the three using American Braille have not yet progressed further than the simplest words, whereas the three using the revised can read two or three sentences. Of course, I realize that this experiment embraces too few children to make it of any great value to science, but it has at least pointed out a way which might be tried on a larger scale. One thing it certainly has established firmly in my mind, and that is a crying need of special classes for the mentally defective blind in our schools and institutions. It is not fair to either the normal or feebleminded blind to try to give them common instruction.

LEILA HOLTERHOFF

NEW YORK CITY

## EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

### FOREIGN STUDENTS IN GERMAN UNIVERSITIES

THE correspondent of the New York *Times* reports that of approximately 7,000 foreign students of all nations attending Germany's 26 universities and institutes of technology there are between 1,700 and 1,800 from former Russia, including students from the new Baltic States. Not more than a couple of hundred have been enrolled from Soviet Russia. Particularly ex-Russians from the Baltic States tend to gravitate toward the German universities because the former Russian universities are no longer available for them.

In Berlin the American Y. M. C. A. Russian relief workers have established a "Russian House" for students, and is said to have furnished funds to enable 250 young Russians to attend Berlin University alone.

These are picked from among the Russian refugees in Germany, and every effort is made to select only those of the highest ability for the Y. M. C. A. scholarships.

For a time after the revolution the German universities, already overcrowded with German students, threatened to be swamped by the influx of foreigners. This pressure has latterly decreased, though the number of foreigners enrolled continues to increase steadily. More, however, can not be accommodated, since the number of German students is again increasing.

The number of foreign students is approximately the same as before the war, including an unusually large number of Japanese—2,000, according to one estimate, the greatest number registering in the courses in medicine and mechanical engineering.

The percentage of foreigners is much higher at the institutes of technology than at the universities. Before the war there were approximately 60,000 students in the German universities and institutes of technology. The number increased to 150,000 in 1919 and has now receded to 120,000. The increase over the pre-war figure is due chiefly to the heavy enrollment of women students, particularly from South Germany.

### UNIVERSITY CONTROL

THE *Bulletin* of the American Association of University Professors prints the following letter to the secretary of the faculty, of an institution the name of which is not given:

*Dear Sir:* I wish you would ask the faculty whether in their judgment it might not be well to have a thorough conference with the president and the trustees about the various functions, privileges, and duties of the trustees, the president, the dean, and the faculty; about whether or not the faculty might well be represented by some one of their own choosing on the board of trustees; about whether or not the faculty ought to elect their own dean and have a voice in the selection of their president; about whether or not the election or removal of a member of the faculty ought to be subject to the veto of the faculty; about the procedure whereby a man becomes a professor with indeterminate tenure; about whether or not the faculty should have a voice in the making of the budget; about whether or not the granting of honorary degrees should be a thing in which the faculty should be consulted; and about other similar matters.

There are at present no recognized and official rules in these matters. We are living under an unwritten law which puts, in my judgment, entirely too much responsibility and power into the hands of the president. I try to administer things sanely and with due regard for the opinion of the faculty; but there is at present nothing to ensure against dire results in case another president, or I myself, should lose balance and get arbitrary.

If the faculty thinks that such matters need attention, I suggest that they write the board between the date of the May faculty meeting and the fifteenth of that month, requesting that these matters may be considered jointly by a committee